

Recognizing the Power of Deficit Ideology in Shaping Perceptions of Child Sexual Abuse

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Received: September 21, 2015

Accepted: October 6, 2015

Available online: October 20, 2015

doi:10.11114/ijsss.v3i6.1098

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v3i6.1098>

Abstract

This paper is reflective and deals with how societies view child sexual abuse through different cultural lenses. The deficits we subconsciously hold can impact, not only our personal views, but our teaching and our treatment methodologies. The purpose is to initiate discussion that will encourage more research on this subject. The objective is to enable practitioners to better recognize the psychological trauma accentuated by violence and sexual abuse and thus allow for better designed treatment programs. Central to this exploration is the concept of deficit ideology. The importance of understanding structural, cultural, and perhaps religious differences that shape ideas about child sexual abuse is stressed.

Keywords: Multicultural competency, Sexual abuse treatment, Deficit Ideology, Emic and etic views

1. Introduction

1.1 Scope of the Study

This study is a discussion and exploration resulting from a training conducted in 2011 with all the staff of programs at a faith-based foundation working with street children in Colombia. The main objective of the foundation where the training took place was to provide a multitude of programs to help disadvantaged children and families in Medellín and the surrounding Antioquía area. Approximately 80 % of the staff were Colombian females. They were trained in social work and psychology, most often at the undergraduate level. The main topic of the training was understanding the impact of sexual abuse and childhood trauma on behavior. The authors of this paper were invited to be trainers and felt we were relatively culturally competent and able to discuss any differences that might arise. As the training progressed it became evident that we as trainers were not getting some of the crucial pieces of the training across to the practitioners. There was an unidentified barrier that, post-training, we conceptualized through the concept of deficit ideology (Gorski, 2010). Deficit ideology, as described by Gorski as, “an ideology, based upon a set of assumed truths about the world and the sociopolitical relationships that occur in it” (Gorski, 2010 p. 3). The concept of deficit ideology, or some configuration of it, is most often used to address hidden bias in the educational system (Gorski, 2010; Sleeter, 2004). In an effort to understand how some of the structural arrangements and cultural beliefs in Colombia may have impacted some of the barriers we faced as trainers, we took time after the training to research these factors through the lens of deficit ideology. This will enable practitioners to understand how deficit ideology shaped the perceptions of both the trainers and trainees. This paper is an effort to encourage more research as well as to offer recommendations to practitioners working with a diverse population.

We started the training by looking at the central characteristic of any abuse in which the dominant position of an adult allowed him or her to force or coerce a child into sexual activity (Child Welfare Information Gateway CWIG, 2011). We encountered many roadblocks in communicating this definition to the staff, including the definition of sexual abuse, the age of consent, the inherent power differential between adult and child, and the concept of victimology. In addition, cultural differences in beliefs about gender roles helped to shape the staff's ideology of who was the victim and who

was the perpetrator. Mixtures of cultural and religious ideologies factored into the apparent deficit ideology that existed concerning females and children on the streets. After the training we asked ourselves what we could learn from this experience and how we could help other trainers and practitioners learn from this experience.

The concept of deficit ideology is an important tool in the analysis of the issues encountered in the training session. Gorski (2010 p. 3) stated that the danger in deficit ideologies is when differences are mistakenly viewed as a deficit, for deficit ideology is much more than individual assumptions and beliefs. Gorski described it as woven into the fabric of society and its socializing institutions. He explains it allows people to focus on fixing the individuals rather than the systematic conditions causing the problems. Gorski described it as a “blame the victim” ideology that systematically applied to a whole group of people. Blame the victim ideology stemmed from a mistaken interpretation of Lewis’s “culture of poverty.” Lewis developed the concept “culture of poverty” by analyzing slum dwellers in Mexico City. He came up with a profile of groups he thought fit into this culture of poverty category. His profile included characteristics such as a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency and of not belonging (Lewis, 1998). In his description he made a clear distinction between impoverishment and the culture of poverty. Social scientists have debated the validity of the very idea of a culture of poverty, arguing it leads to an attitude of blaming the victim. Ryan, the author of *Blaming the Victim* (1971), saw the idea of a culture of poverty deflecting from the actual structural problems that caused poverty, thus taking away the responsibility of society to deal with the issue of poverty. This debate will likely continue but there is no doubt that believing there is an actual “culture of poverty” can lead to stereotyping entire groups of people, thus creating a deficit ideology toward an entire group.

Deficit ideology, in this study, is related to females, the poor, displaced children and people on the streets of Medellín, Colombia. In order to discuss the ways in which a deficit ideology might help explain some of the difficulties encountered during the training of the staff, additional details about social, structural and sociopolitical conditions in Colombia needed to be analyzed. Deficit ideologies develop over a long period of time and involve complex sets of circumstances, as well as cultural practices. The following discussion analyses how poverty, violence, the general view of street children, social policies, and cultural practices have contributed to the ingrained deficit ideologies in Medellín, Colombia.

2. Method

This paper is reflective and stems from the experience of encountering barriers while training Colombian practitioners about the ways in which childhood sexual abuse impacts behavior. We the researchers identified that these barriers could be conceptualized most accurately within a discussion of the concept of deficit ideology, as it was present for both the trainers and trainees. We used this experience as a starting place to examine what could be done differently and how future trainers and practitioners could improve their cultural competency and improve training and treatment methods. The methods were:

- a) Qualitative
- b) Secondary analysis
- c) Multifaceted, taking into account both structural and cultural aspects of the society

This analysis of the cultural and structural conditions that likely played a factor in the barriers we encountered was analyzed through the lens of what James Collins (1988) referred to as Deficit theory. Collins focused his research on education and power of language on people’s perceptions of abilities and intellect. This theory also connects back to the work of Fredrick Erickson (1987). Erickson focused much of his research on the ways in which cultural differences impacted learning abilities and interactions between teachers and students.

This paper brings the focus of this deficit ideology (Gorski, 2010) to professionals and how both the learners and the instructors might be impacted by these deficits. This research brings a new discourse to the field as it seeks to examine not only the practitioner’s hidden deficits but also the deficits the trainers may have had. Our premise is that poverty, violence, social policy, and deeply ingrained cultural practices all contributed to deeply ingrained deficit ideologies.

3. Literature Review

Poverty: A long history of poverty created a deficit ideology that persisted even when the poverty was showing signs of declining. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book indicators were promising in Colombia, with the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growing more than 4% for the past three years, continuing almost a decade of strong economic growth (CIA, 2013). The CIA cautioned that in spite of this growth, the unemployment rate stood at 10.3%, one of Latin America’s highest. Even with positive growth, widespread corruption and economic instability over the last century have resulted in Colombia having a huge rift between two economic classes—the rich and poor—with an almost nonexistent but increasing middle class, particularly in the Bogotá and Medellín areas (Epifania’s Noticias, 2009). Colombia was under great pressure from the international community to address poverty. The Guardian, a news

agency supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reported that according to the World Bank, 28% of Colombians (more than 12 million people) were poor (living on less than \$2.00 a day). Seven million or 16% of Colombians were extremely poor (making less than \$1.25 a day) (2011). Sixty-four percent of Colombians fell below the national poverty line. Its inequality of land distribution was 0.87. The Guardian stated, "Colombia is now probably the most unequal country in Latin America" (2011, p. 3).

Violence: One may deduce that poverty and violence have a dialectical relationship in Colombia, each influencing the other. The following discussion below brings us to this conclusion. Both poverty and violence have a long history in Colombia and consequently could contribute to an ingrained deficit ideology amongst the general population. According to the Guardian, "inequality is at the heart of violent conflict and remains the greatest barrier to social cohesion" (2011, p. 3). The agency suggested an emphasis on wealth redistribution. Human Rights Watch (2010) claimed that even with the government demobilization four years ago, the violence continued. They attributed this continued violence to "successor groups", whose members' numbered in the thousands. They operated in vast areas of Colombia and were responsible for massacres, killings, forced displacement, rape and extortion, as well as drug trafficking. These groups were scattered across the countryside, where police forces might not have a presence, and the government had taken no serious steps to address this problem (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices reported that in 2011 the internal armed conflict continued between the government and terrorist organizations. Along with serious legal corruption, the Country Report indicated that there was still insubordinate military collaboration with members of illegal armed groups, forced disappearances, overcrowded and insecure prisons, harassment of human rights workers and activists, violence against women, trafficking in persons, and illegal child labor (The Guardian, 2011).

The International Office for Human Rights Action on Colombia (2011) reported that forced disappearances in Colombia accounted for approximately 61,604 missing persons, according to the National Commission on Disappeared Persons. Colombia had the most disappearances in Latin America (Guest, 2011). This strategy was used as a mechanism to control populations, to suppress political opposition, to instill fear in the local populations and even for "social cleansing" (Guest, 2011). Even though Colombia's 1991 constitution prohibited these forced disappearances, the cases were very difficult to prosecute due to lack of evidence and bodies (Guest, 2011). The continuing violence resulted in a growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) women and children were disproportionately impacted in this population (IDMC, 2013). Many of these people ended up on the outskirts of cities living under bridges, in abandoned buildings, or in cardboard shacks. Not only did IDPs suffer from poverty and malnutrition, a survey by Colombian NGO Profamilia found that displaced girls and young women aged 13 to 19 had the highest rate of pregnancy and childbearing in the country for their age group: 30% versus 19% for their non-displaced counterparts. The same study also found that women were victims of 95% all cases of spousal violence. Half of the women who suffered from aggression fell into the age range of 15 to 24 years (Reproductive Health Response to in Crisis Consortium, RHRC, 2010).

Guerilla groups, paramilitary forces, and soldiers in the government armed forces often used rape and sexual violence to intimidate. Statistics from the Colombian Institute of Legal Medicine, cited by Watch List (2007), indicated that the rate of rape of adolescent girls was about 2.5 per 1,000 and estimates indicated that only 17% of these cases were reported. Another report by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Unseen Millions* (2002), indicated that women and girls displaced by armed conflict were raped more frequently than in other poor areas, or in the country as a whole. According to this report, female IDPs were also more likely to be victims of trafficking.

Not all violence against women was related to structural conditions. Culture also played a role in the perpetuation of violence against women and girls. Family roles in Colombia tend to be traditional, and women generally played a subordinate role in society. Domestic violence was prevalent in Colombia. A Pan American Health Organization report indicated 41% of women who ever lived with a partner said their partner had abused them, and 34% said their partner threatened them. In addition, a relative had physically abused another 20% of the women surveyed (2006).

Street Children: Often some combination of poverty and violence resulted in children on the streets. Street children were often shunned by the general population in Colombia, and a negative attitude about them persisted. (Aptekar, 1994). Aptekar (1994) says their visibility often resulted in a general disdain for this population. The increased number of IDPs had certainly increased the number of street children in major cities, as noted above, but still did not completely explain the entire situation. The most common response to street children from the public was scorn and hostility. Street children were objects of a great deal of violence. Even though these children were victims of violence at the hands of the public and sometimes each other, their biggest fear was of the police brutality that often occurred (Aptekar, 1991).

The street children were in the midst of a social class struggle and the attitudes toward them were mainly directed toward their families (Aptekar, 1994). There was a stark difference in internal family relations and child rearing in

upper class families and that in poorer families. Boys in upper class families were encouraged to stay home until they married, girls were chaperoned and controlled, and neither married without the blessing of the parents. The girls were told that their status in society would depend on who they married. In poorer families, where the family was usually more matrifocal, the males miss the value of a male role model and they were socialized to leave home at puberty and become independent of their mother. The girls were taught that they did not have to be dependent on a man to support them. The two different family types had different levels of power in society, causing the higher social class to judge the poor families by upper class standards (Apetekar, 1991). Apetekar stated that this was very helpful in understanding society's reaction to the children. This stark difference in social class ideas about child rearing fueled the scorn and hostility toward street children and their families. This adds credence to the theory that even well-meaning professionals, as in this study, could unconsciously develop a deficit ideology about these children.

Legal Policy: It is possible that legal policy has an impact on a whole society's attitude or the deficit ideology of the street children and the sexually exploited children. In the case of sexually exploited girls, the legalization of prostitution had a huge impact. Adult prostitution (legal age 18) was allowed in Colombia with some restrictions. The prostitution was supposed to be restricted to "tolerance zones" but the law was very difficult to enforce. The law stated that pimping was illegal, as was trafficking of women, but it continued to be a problem (ProCon.org, 2009). Having legal prostitution created serious problems related to sexual trafficking and underage prostitution. The U.S. government took a strong position against legalized prostitution, based on evidence that it was inherently harmful and dehumanizing and fueled trafficking in persons, a form of modern slavery. The 2002 National Security Presidential Directive also found that 89% of women in prostitution want to escape (U.S. State Department, 2004). The same study showed that 60-75% of women in prostitution were raped. Seventy to 95% were physically assaulted, and 86% met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. This debunked the myth, often used anecdotally, that the woman working as a prostitute wanted to be there or that this was in any way a victimless crime. The United Nations indicated approximately thirty-five thousand children in Colombia were working as prostitutes (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2001). A representative of UNICEF said many were as young as nine years old and were paid about six dollars per client. The clients were mostly middle-aged foreigners (BBC, 2001). There was good reason to believe that the policy of legal prostitution, technically for women 18 and over, in Colombia contributed to more underage prostitution and trafficking of young girls. Legalizing prostitution reinforced deficit ideologies about the place of women in society. On the other hand, on paper, Colombia had protections for women and children in their constitution. The statistics and realities of abuse and violence outlined in this paper indicated that much more effort needed to go into implementing the rights incorporated into the constitution.

The text of the Constitution of Colombia stated the following in chapter two, articles 43 & 44:

Article 43. Women and men have equal rights and opportunities. Women cannot be subjected to any type of discrimination. During their periods of pregnancy and following delivery, women will benefit from the special assistance and protection of the state and will receive from the latter food subsidies if they should thereafter find themselves unemployed or abandoned.

The state will support the female head of household in a special way.

Article 44. The following are basic rights of children: life, physical integrity, health and social security, a balanced diet, their name and citizenship, to have a family and not be separated from it, care and love, instruction and culture, recreation, and the free expression of their opinions. They will be protected against all forms of abandonment, physical or moral violence, imprisonment, sale, sexual abuse, work or economic exploitation, and dangerous work. They will also enjoy other rights upheld in the Constitution, the laws, and international treaties ratified by Colombia.

Cultural Factors That May Contribute to a Deficit Ideology: In addition to poverty, violence, and social policy, there were some other cultural aspects that played a role in perpetuating ideologies that cast women and children as being "less than" in a society. This type of deficit ideology was pervasive and hard to recognize, especially within individuals. Several issues to consider were ambiguity concerning the age of adulthood, familism, and also child circulation. Probably the biggest factor in a deficit ideology about women in general was machismo.

One of the first cultural difficulties trainers faced in the training session was determining the actual cultural perception of when a child became an adult. U.N. protocol and U.S. law in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRS) states that "every human being below the age of 18, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier, is considered a child" (Gozdziak, 2008, p. 904). This reality varies from culture to culture. Even the CRS had to allow for some of those cultural differences. Much depended on cultural social, historical, religious, and rational norms, as well as one's circumstances. In addition, there is a sizable difference between a four year old and a seventeen year old (Gozdziak, 2008). In Colombia the legal age of consent for males was 14; for females it was 12 (Worldwide Age of Consent, 2013). The legal age for marriage without parental approval or for selling sex was eighteen (Wiki-Gender,

2009). This made it difficult to define the term “child”. In fact, many of the victims in Gozdzia’s study did not consider themselves children or victims. The UN Convention on the Rights of Children (CRS) and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) made a clear distinction between children and adults. Gozdzia quoted Sanghera (2005, p. 911) as saying, “Any child under eighteen is deemed innocent and in need of special protection and assistance in making decisions.”

Tradition and culture play a big role in the perception of a female’s transition to adulthood. At age 15 a Latino girl’s family marks her coming of age rite by having a celebration known as a quinceanera. This formerly indigenous ceremony is now synchronized with Catholic rituals, indicating that cultural and religious beliefs factor into the understanding of the age at which a child becomes an adult. Rankin and Kenyon (2008) explained that people acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the culture in which they were socialized. They recognized that human development was shaped by cultural influences; therefore, it was important to address cultural values in any research.

Familism was often practiced in Colombia. Familism referred to a deep loyalty and attachment to family, including extended family (DiGiunta, 2011). According to the *Adaptation Guidelines for Serving Latino Children and Families Affected by Trauma* (2010), familism is the preference for maintaining a close connection to one’s family. Close relationships, cohesiveness and cooperation with other family members are highly valued in Latino culture. In spite of all the poverty and the violence resulting in IDPs, being loyal to family and fulfilling any obligation is still considered respectful. This familism is expected to take precedence over personal ambitions. Colombian culture was characterized by collectivistic rather than individualistic values (DiGiunta, 2011). The researchers learned it was not uncommon for the residents of the sexually exploited girls’ program at which we provided the training to run away and return to their previous life in order to take care of their own family. This happened frequently and was of great concern to the program staff and the government officials. The staff communicated to the trainers that many of the residents would self-report that they needed to leave because their family needed the money that they earned from the streets. While familism is often a positive value, the staff noted that in these situations it was perpetuating dysfunctional cycles. This could lead to practices that are harmful, in this case child circulation.

Child circulation, or “fostering out”, is commonly practiced in Latin America. This is not only cultural but often reflects the family’s circumstances, economic and otherwise. The reasons for a child being sent to live with other relatives and friends varies widely (Gozdzia, 2008), including caregiver illness or death, divorce, parents’ separation, mutual help among family members, educational opportunities, and strengthening family ties. According to Gozdzia, about one-third of Colombian children spent some of their childhood without a father and an additional 9% did not live with their mothers. Many of these children were sent to various relatives and eventually ended up homeless or semi-homeless. One example Gozdzia provided: A child was sent to his or her grandmother because the parent could not provide for the child. The grandmother later got sick or died and the child was sent to another relative, who often felt obligated but did not really want the child. The child eventually ended up being abused, exploited, or trafficked (p. 917). While child circulation is a cultural practice, the violent situation in Colombia made it more likely to happen and it often had detrimental consequences. Many of the children in the program described in this paper had been fostered out through this child circulation method before they landed in the streets.

Gender Roles in Colombia still seem very distinct. The Latin concepts of Machismo and Marianismo had to be factored into any exploration of attitudes about gender roles in Latin America. This seemed to be a contributing factor in the development of a deficit ideology that permeated the whole culture. As noted above, cultural influences played an integral role in shaping the perception of reality. Machismo was derived from macho and referred to the qualities of a real man. The behaviors associated with machismo included sexual aggressiveness, drinking, violent behavior and risk taking (Ward & Edelstein, 2009). One woman in Cali, Colombia shared that “it is a rare husband who doesn’t beat his wife, who doesn’t have a mistress, who is loving.” (p. 108). According to Ward and Edelstein, this left the women trying to keep the family together for the children and for the societal respect having a husband engendered. Rondon (2003) painted a picture of a longsuffering woman, incapable of feeling pleasure, who just tried to be understanding because men were childlike and should not be judged. In his book *The Machismo and Marianismo Tango* (2009), Sequerira traced the history of machismo back to Moorish Spain. According to Sequerira, 75% of the time a man went out, got drunk, had extramarital relationships, beat his wife, and accused her of being unfaithful. The woman conformed to the role of being subservient, thus unconsciously passing that model onto her children.

Marianismo was a term that referred to the Virgin Mary and denoted saintliness, passivity, and longsuffering. This promoted a sacred rationale for female subordination (Ward & Edelstein, 2009). According to Sequerira (2009), marianismo could be considered the counterpart to machismo. In the Catholic religion the Virgin Mary was an idealized model of womanhood, whereas Eve came to represent the moral inferiority of women. As a result women came to be represented by two opposing characters: the good mother virgin was represented by the Virgin Mary and the bad-raped opponent was represented by Malinche. Malinche was the historical, mythical woman who became the lover of Hernan

Cortez and Spanish conquistador. This ingrained religious belief could help explain the contrast between upper class families and poor families in regard to internal family relations and gender roles as discussed above. In Latino countries sexual assault of adolescent and adult women is commonplace. So ingrained were these cultural/religious concepts that some women did not realize they had been legally raped and others were fearful to report it, for good reason (Sequerira, 2009).

In *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*, Brusco (1995) made the case that the growth of the Evangelical Church in Colombia could reconfigure the beliefs about machismo. Colombia was approximately 3.5% Evangelical Protestant, compared with 81 % Catholic (Wallmark, 2006). Brusco believed the evangelical church not only gave women a sense of empowerment within the church, but also changed the family dynamics. She saw the stereotype of women being considered morally superior as strength in the relationships between men and women. Brusco argued that the female's role in the evangelical household was to be the defender of moral standards and continually try to reform the man. Her idea was that the female should not give up until it was a success. Brusco says that Colombian Pentecostalism was a form of female collective action that was not trying to gain access to the male world, but to elevate domesticity for women and men. She stated, "In evangelical households the husband may be the powerful one, but his relative aspirations have changed to coincide with his wife" (p. 122). The evangelical church claimed it had brought many families in Colombia together. This evangelical ideology emphasized the male must respect the female; however, it taught the man was the head of the household and held the authority in decision making. This topic was important because the foundation where the training was conducted espoused the evangelical approach. The experience of the authors indicated that in some instances they did seemingly improve the family life of some by offering alternatives to drinking and being promiscuous. Machismo had assumed a more benevolent presence, but as Brusco (1995) pointed out, the husband was still the powerful one. It appeared that women must choose between a violent overseer and a benevolent one. This transformation did not change the basic configuration of the power ratio in Colombia. It appeared it had done little to change the deficit ideology pertaining to women and girls in Colombia.

Potential Psychological Impacts of Displacement: Displacement was a strategy of war that quickly shifted the power differential as homeowners lost land, family members, pride, and safety (WCRC, 2002). These internally displaced people (IDPs) were often stripped of their belongings and their right to have basic needs met and were moved into environments and conditions in which they were not accustomed to living (WCRC, 2002). Each of these losses could significantly affect a child's level of need, overall. Harper, Harper and Stills (2003) identified, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, that children and adolescents are best served following the fulfillment of their basic needs in order of priority: physical needs, the need for a safe environment, the need for love and a sense of belonging, the need for esteem, and finally, the need for self-actualization. Having these basic needs unmet could be difficult for a person of any age, and adolescents and children who were displaced faced additional losses: loss of opportunity for development in a stable environment, loss of dignity which came with increased stigmatization, loss of self-esteem and self-worth, loss of educational rights, and loss of vocational opportunities (WCRC, 2002).

The trauma incurred by these losses, the violence to which displaced children were exposed, and the threat of losing one's life created a set of behavioral health needs specific to the IDP population (Human Rights Watch, 2010; WCRC, 2011). Displaced children may have blamed themselves for the displacement or its negative impacts on the family because often, parents had moved in part to keep their children safe (WCRC, 2002). Children may have been forced to take on adult roles, and psychologists who had worked with the IDP population reported that parents often limited children's activities outside the home to protect them from recruitment or prostitution. These factors led to increased depression, phobias, anxiety, and aggression in displaced children, most of whom had limited or no access to healthcare to treat these issues (WCRC, 2002). Understanding the distinction between mental health symptoms/reactions to trauma and externalizing behaviors that occurred as the result of a significant deficit in basic needs was important to those working with the displaced adolescent or child. This distinction was significant because if a child's basic needs were not met, that child might not be in a position to respond to interventions designed to decrease mental health symptoms (Harper, Harper & Stills, 2003). Throughout the training this distinction was highlighted, and while the staff readily understood the importance of meeting basic physical needs and the need for a safe environment, they struggled to recognize the externalizing behaviors that continued after these needs were met as reactions to trauma or symptoms of a mental illness.

Along with the losses and trauma that adolescents experienced during internal displacement, many adolescents were victims of or witnesses to sexual violence (Maloney, 2011; HRW, 2010; WCRC, 2002). Like displacement, sexual violence rapidly shifted control to its aggressors, evoking fear, humiliation, and vulnerability. Sexual violence as a strategy of war forced women and children to abandon their homes, was used to punish and intimidate enemies, and created a culture of fear (WCRC, 2011; Maloney, 2011). These crimes often went un-pursued, and their numbers were rapidly increasing. Often girls were invited to spend the weekends with paramilitary offices as "community service" and

were murdered if they refused (WCRC, 2011). Children in IDP communities might perform sexual acts for those in power in hopes of preventing additional violence or murder or to gain financial benefits or items that would help meet basic needs (WCRC, 2011). These adolescents may have seen sex not as a war tactic but as a way to protect themselves or offer something to an aggressor with the hope of earning safety in return. There was a distinct deficit ideology among the staff in this area, and the trainers observed that the staff perceived the girls in the program as promiscuous or oppositional as opposed to understanding their behaviors in the context of their histories.

Although the adolescent may have viewed sex as a means of self-protection, adolescents who are victims of sexual violence and abuse are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms such as depression or suicide ideation and externalizing symptoms such as running away, drug or alcohol use, and sexual promiscuity or “acting out” (Beitchman et al., 1991). Similarly, young children who are sexually abused are more likely to demonstrate sexually inappropriate play, aggressive behavior, and sexual acting out (Beitchman et al., 1991) and are at higher risk for engaging in prostitution in the future (Widon & Kuhns, 1996). Studies indicated that a greater frequency, intensity, and duration of the abuse and violence could increase the severity of these symptoms (Beitchman et al., 1991). When a child or adolescent who had been abused begins to present with these problems, the caregiver might find it unclear what is inherent to that youth and struggle to associate difficult behaviors with his or her past trauma. For example, during the training the staff referred to the girls in the sexually exploited girls program as “addicted to sex” and indicated that they feared that many of the girls in the program were lesbians, for at times the girls were caught interacting sexually with one another. The trainers attempted to present the idea that the youth in the program may have been seeking fulfillment of the basic need for love and a sense of belonging or they may have been reenacting past sexual trauma. However, the staff’s religious and cultural beliefs made accepting this idea difficult. Perhaps the staff members were reacting to safety concerns and externalizing behaviors as opposed to identifying that the youths’ basic needs were not previously being met and using this model to develop a framework for understanding the children with whom they were working. This highlights the importance of exposing this problem. Professionals working to challenge these misconceptions about behavior should be knowledgeable about the deficit ideologies present in the culture in which they are working. With that knowledge, the professionals could understand and challenge the misconceptions in a culturally competent way.

Cultural competence in training is of primary importance in this research. Passalacqua and Cervantes (2008) examined the implications of gender and culture within the context of spirituality for counselors and noted that failure to assess and understand the belief systems of a client or population can lead to ethical and value differences that influence assessment and treatment of clients. One could abstract this concept to training. In this case, while the trainers felt relatively culturally competent we were not prepared for the deficit ideologies present. Perhaps the training was met with this degree of challenge because we made the erroneous assumption that the concepts we were introducing to the staff were etic in nature and would be readily accepted by the trainees (i.e., the effects of childhood trauma on externalizing behaviors). Likewise, we may have believed we were developing the training to include an emic perspective when in reality, we missed important concepts. McNabb, Worthley and Jenner (2010) cautioned professionals against pseudo-emic assessment of a population, in which professionals assume national applicability of cultural concepts without evidence supporting its application. In this case, we as trainers faced multilevel barriers as we were asking the staff at the program to view the girls from an emic approach when the staff may not have understood all of the information outlined in this paper. In addition, as presenters we may have developed the training from a pseudo-emic perspective, assuming that the cultural experiences of the staff and girls in the program were similar. For professionals working to counsel or to educate across cultures, understanding the culture in which they were working from a truly emic perspective could decrease ethnocentrism and increase results. This is an additional reason to focus more research in this area.

3. Conclusions

This study had several limitations. One limitation of this study was that it did not start out as an actual research study. The concerns arose as the result of experiences encountered in the planned staff training for professionals working with victimized children. It should serve as a catalyst to additional qualitative studies focused on gathering information concerning the staff’s emic views on the subject. Researchers are confined to the etic view without further study. More extensive research would be necessary in order to draw conclusions. Another limitation was the inability to make any conclusions about how much of the difficulty encountered in the training was due to the culture and religious beliefs of the staff hired by the organization in which the training occurred versus the broader culture of Colombia.

This paper highlights the need for more research by observing that there are many connections between the structural and cultural conditions in Colombia that may result in deficit ideologies. These connections factored into the difficulty of presenting a training session on the impact of child sex abuse on behavior to Colombian practitioners. The trainers assumed that the staff had an understanding that poverty and violence prevalent in Colombia often resulted in IDPs and street children, setting the stage for corruption and exploitation of these oppressed groups. Having a sense of security

regarding food, shelter, and safety is the infrastructure of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the trainers presumed that the staff understood that without this sense of security adults and children could be more susceptible to predators, vulnerable to victimization, and part of an unequal power equation in which the needy individual felt helpless. Thus, the deficit ideologies were significant for both trainers and trainees.

Another one of the major struggles in the staff training might have been that while the adolescents or children in the program were primarily working to meet their needs, their behavior could be unsafe and deviant, forcing the staff to respond to crises versus giving them the time to consider the root of the risky behaviors. Further studies should take into consideration that even a group of professionals who work with this population may require ongoing education to adequately understand the ways in which a youth's history will affect his or her behaviors. For example, one of the issues in the training pertained to young girls' behavior and how it was viewed by the staff of the programs. Many of the girls acted out by exhibiting promiscuous behavior, which was interpreted by some of the staff as the girls "being addicted to sex". Understanding how to help caregivers appropriately perceive the behaviors of youth who have been traumatized and consider the experience of their past abuse is important to foster a positive youth/caregiver experience. Cultural beliefs played a significant role in how this behavior was viewed. Machismo and Marianismo were so ingrained throughout this culture that even with the more benevolent version taught by evangelical ministries, the basic power structure stayed the same and this dominant male/submissive female arrangement had not changed. Even more troubling was the dual view of women as either the pure virgin (i.e., Maria), or the bad-raped opponent, represented by Malinche, as explained earlier by Seguerira (2009). This allowed the "blame the victim" attitude associated with a deficit ideology. Since a deficit ideology is absorbed by everyone socialized into a society, it stands to reason that both the professional staff and the girls and boys receiving treatment in the programs developed deficit ideologies. It was even more significant that social institutions passed on this ideology since it was woven into the fabric of society, as Gorski (2010) described. Using this line of reasoning, it was likely that the institutions where these professionals were trained accepted the status quo ideology as the norm and therefore did not attempt to challenge its premise.

4. Recommendations

There are many recommendations for the ongoing problems in Colombia. Poverty and violence are still issues in Colombia but there are improvements being made. Violence continues to be a problem, although it had taken a new form, with "successor groups" perpetrating this violence across the countryside. Social policy changes could play a role in making some behavioral differences. Legal prostitution and an ambiguous legal age made it easy for children to be used as prostitutes. A good guide for instituting women's rights, as well as protection for children, is the Colombian Constitution's articles 43 and 44. Colombia's constitution was very clear about equal rights and protections for women and children. This might be a good place to start with training staff or the public in general. Authorities should be implementing policies that comply with this constitution. The more Colombians insist on this, the more empowered they may be to make the change happen.

There are ways to help individuals, communities, and societies who may be experiencing difficult situations if an understanding of the cultural practices is fostered and the people from that culture are empowered to have a say in how positive changes can be made. For example, empowering women and girls to have a voice could increase their self-esteem so that they no longer accept being viewed in a deficit manner. Needless to say, when structural circumstances, such as poverty and violence, are present change is slower to come about. We (the trainers) learned that even though a fairly culturally competent person can set out to educate a group of people, neglecting to attend to deficit ideologies among all parties involved can result in a frustrating experience and diminish results. If one is developing a cross-cultural training, we recommend that the presenter takes time to educate him/herself about the obvious, subtle, and hidden deficit ideologies present in both the trainer and trainees.

There are also recommendations for healthcare practitioners and higher institutions of learning. Recognizing the complexity of social structure including but not limited to, poverty, violence, and internal displacement is crucial to gaining a better grasp of how to improve understanding of just how the pervasive subconscious deficit ideologies are. The same is true for social policy such as legal prostitution and age of consent as well as various cultural beliefs about women, social class, street children, and all factors of a multicultural population. Researchers and practitioners can benefit from regular training and self-evaluation of this subject. Institutions of higher learning can include courses about cultural competency and deficit ideologies as part of their standard curriculum. This paper lays the groundwork for more extensive studies. This should be a first step in allowing practitioners to develop more appropriate treatment and training modalities for this vulnerable population.

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